

NIMROD'S TRACE - 64  
BY RON MOODY  
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EXHIBIT 7  
DATE 2/3/09  
HB 382

## HUNTING HERITAGE SURVIVAL FEARS FOCUS ON YOUNG NIMRODS

Attracting more young people to become new hunters is, beyond doubt, the biggest challenge every adult nimrod wishes somebody else would solve.

The challenge is indeed serious – American hunters get older and fewer every year. And, the recruitment deficit is one cloud over the future of hunting that just about everybody can see and understand.

This subject of recruiting young hunters comes up a lot in rod & gun club dissertations and deer camp think tanks: the consensus opinion seems to be that, “they ought to do something about that.”

Several important “theys” in the hunting community are making organized efforts to bring more youths into hunting. There is reason to question whether some of those efforts are on the right track, however.

State lawmakers are attacking the problem by passing new laws that:

1. Create more youth hunting opportunities with special seasons and liberal harvest rules such as extra game tags, etc.
2. Cut the entry cost of hunting for youths with free or reduced fees and licenses
3. Mitigate minimum age and hunter education requirements.

## WHY YOUTHS DON'T BECOME HUNTERS

The MAIN reason, however, too few youths take up hunting today is not because of legal barriers. It is because too few adult hunters make a personal commitment to mentoring a youngster – particularly outside their own household - into hunting.

Making hunting doable and fun can't be achieved by putting a check in the mail, or by passing another law. It's not our rules that deter new young hunters; it's our adult attitudes.

A new hunter is almost always a hand-made product crafted by real people doing things together. That most hunters don't want to give up their own fun to mentor somebody else's kid is understandable, (perhaps: If hunting is just about having fun). But too many parent hunters also don't mentor their own kids.

The reason Hunter Education courses became mandatory in the first place was that society learned by tragic experience that many hunter-parents could not, or would not, properly mentor their children as safe, responsible hunters. As far as making young people into safe hunters is concerned, the 54-year track record of Hunter Education speaks for itself.

## THE HUNTING FAMILY

The most powerful single tool for creating new hunters remains the hunting family. Whatever else we do, we want to empower this tool. HOW we do that is the question. My belief is that we should wrap a stronger hunting village around the family rather than simply tinkering with the rules.

Hunters who are unwilling to give themselves into a "village" of continuing supportive experience for youths cannot be surprised if the now-isolated hunting family is unable to produce enough recruits to keep the culture going (no matter how lenient the rules). As vital as it still is, the hunting family no longer can do it alone.

And then there is everybody else. Youths who live in non-hunting families are unlikely to get an invitation into the hunting community as long as hunters expect somebody else to extend the invitation.

And, once a youth gets past adolescence as a non-hunter, She or he finds few hunting hands reaching out by any means.

We know the social forces of our urban, techno-frenzied world are not friendly to earthy, agrarian cultures such as hunting. I advocate a recruitment strategy that creates personal connection programs designed so that hunters, as a community, can aggressively penetrate and counter those adverse social forces.

The current rave, however, is to do more rule tinkering such as eliminating minimum age rules so that younger children can hunt bigger game with their parent. My prediction is that 10 years from now we'll see that this approach has done nothing to improve recruitment rates for new young hunters. In fact, current laws leave plenty of opportunities for parents to introduce their very young children to the hunting world without needing a big game license to do so.

Items 1 and 2 in the above list can help and certainly will not hurt the hunting family – particularly where the family budget is tight and time-off for hunting is difficult. They do little, however, to connect non-hunters to the sport unless a real, live mentor makes the connection happen.

Item 3 is more problematic. Reducing age requirements by way of 'apprentice hunting' programs may be positive in a family where an adult really does mentor the youth, and the added younger years are spent doing things the youngster likes to do. I see no evidence, however, that putting a youth on a deer stand at age 8 instead of 12 makes them enjoy hunting more than if they had spent the same years in the woods with dad or mom as an unlicensed buddy.

The catch is that adults have to know the difference between what they think the youngster OUGHT to enjoy (thinking usually drawn from the parent's own preferences) and what the youngster will see as being more fun than staying home to play video games. Minus this wisdom the recruiting power of a lower age requirement shrinks into the statistical woodwork.

#### 'FAMILIES AFIELD'

'Families Afield' is a national effort by the United States Sportsmen's Alliance, National Shooting Sports Foundation and the National Wild Turkey Federation. Their worthy goal is to bring new hunters into the sport.

This program, because large, reputable groups sponsor it, is gathering momentum and has caused the passage of new laws in states like Ohio and Pennsylvania.

The program centers on creating an apprentice-hunting license for youths who are younger than the legal minimum age to buy a regular hunting license. It also allows licensed, mentor hunters to take apprentice hunters into the field prior to the completion of hunter education certification.

Because properly mentored youths are unlikely to get into unsafe situations I don't object to the concept. I just don't think the statistics predict that targeting children under 12 with this kind of program is going to make any difference in the long run.

Where this concept could make a huge positive difference is for non-hunters over 16 years of age. Ironically, the 'Families Afield' program doesn't target that group. This was precisely the bill I proposed to the 2005 Montana Legislature. It didn't pass, but the idea is still valid.

I do strongly disagree with the rhetoric of 'Families Afield' that requiring a Hunter Education class and a hunting license constitute what the sponsors call "barriers to youth hunting" and "restrictive requirements."

"Families Afield" sponsors base their argument on one study they conducted, which purports to prove that all we need to make safe, responsible hunters is a diligent adult mentor. Mandatory Hunter Ed training is a liability to recruitment, according to their statistics.

First, I think their statistical analysis is wrong. Second, they disregard the aspect of mandatory hunter education that positively recruits new hunters.

The reason I question the 'Families Afield' use of statistics is because of another study done in 1997 by Thomas Heberlein and Elizabeth Thomson, and published in the journal, "Human Dimensions of Wildlife."

In the 1997 study, first-level analysis of the effects of hunter education requirements on hunting participation and recruitment matches what 'Families Afield' reports.

These researchers, however, went further. They found that simply comparing states with and without H.E. requirements is misleading unless the study corrects for social forces that make one state different from another.

In fact, the 1997 study reports that the same social forces, such as high urban populations, intolerance for hunter misbehavior, poor access to opportunity, etc., that cause a state to impose mandatory Hunter Ed in the first place also work to depress hunter recruitment regardless of regulatory entry "barriers."

After correcting for social variances, the 1997 study found that recruitment difference between states with mandatory Hunter Ed and those without shrank to less than one percent.

Beyond statistics, mandatory Hunter Ed creates an accessible entry portal for youths who have no family mentor and have to find Step-One on their own. And, passing Hunter Ed has persuaded many a reluctant Mom to allow her child (whom she knows all too well) to go out the door with a firearm.

Least the 'Families Afield' folks leave this discussion feeling bruised, I do believe that experiments should be pursued. I just think they have targeted the wrong age class for real results.

Another program, sponsored by the same groups is their 'Trailblazer Adventure Program,' an education program developed to introduce whole families to the outdoors. This is a great example of a community connection program.

If the hunting family is our most powerful recruiting tool, then let's recruit families. I like that idea.

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# Fish and Wildlife Reference Service Newsletter

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## The Effects of Mandatory Basic Hunter Education and Advanced Hunter Training on Hunter Recruitment, Satisfaction and Retention

The purpose of this study was to determine the costs and benefits of basic hunter education and advanced hunter training on hunter recruitment, retention and satisfaction. Several different methodologies were used to assess this impact, including focus groups, a regression analysis, and two telephone surveys; one of active hunters and another of U. S. youth.

Mandatory basic hunter education is supported by a strong majority of U. S. non-hunters, active hunters and youth interested in hunting. Moreover, almost three-quarters (70%) of youth who are interested in hunting do not feel that a requirement to take a hunter education course would prevent them from hunting. An analysis of 1980 data from the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation in 1984 by Dr. Jim Applegate of Rutgers University indicated that mandatory hunter education did not impact hunter recruitment at that time. A similar analysis conducted for this study with data from the 1980, 1985 and 1991 National Surveys of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation indicated that the impacts of mandatory hunter education on hunter recruitment were minimal, and in the 11 - 15 year age group may actually increase recruitment.

However, 19% -- about 1 out of every 5 -- 13 - 20 year olds interested in hunting do feel that a requirement to take a hunter education course would prevent them from hunting.

Based on the updated regression analysis as well as the nationwide survey of 13 to 20 year olds, it does appear that mandatory hunter education is having a slight impact on hunter recruitment. This cost of hunter education must be weighed against other non-recruitment related benefits of hunter education, including public attitudes toward hunter education, hunter safety, the exact reasons why it is inhibiting recruitment (probably related to course promotion and availability), and the differences between youth who had taken a hunter education course and those who had not. Specifically, basic hunter education course takers used multiple weapons, hunted more frequently, and projected more future hunting participation.

In addition to weighing the costs and benefits of basic mandatory hunter education, it is important to consider the reasons behind the slight impact. Does mandatory hunter education in and of itself negatively affect recruitment? Based on this study, we believe the slight impact basic mandatory hunter education is having on hunter recruitment lies within the availability and promotional aspects of the course. As one focus group respondents stated: "You need to make it readily available if they're going to mandate that you do it. It's relatively easy to get a driver's license because it's readily available. You can't mandate something and then be restrictive in offering the availability of it." Course availability and promotion must be considered. Fifty-six percent of U. S. youths have never seen a hunter education course advertised. Agencies can no longer depend on word of mouth or just PSAs to promote basic hunter education courses. In addition to traditional media outlets, agencies should consider alternative promotional efforts as well, including the worldwide web page and hunter education video game currently being developed by the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

Agencies should consider promoting the aspects of the course that are of highest interest to potential students -- safety, hunting techniques, handling of equipment, and hands-on work in addition to classroom learning.

The main reason most children who are not interested in hunting is because of issues surrounding the killing of animals. Agencies should continue to confront this issue. Among those U. S. youths aged 13 - 20 not interested in hunting, almost two-thirds (65%) said they were not interested in hunting because they were against killing animals or that animals have a right to live.

(continued on page 2)

The issue of mandatory advanced training is not a top-of-the mind issue when non-bowhunters and non-muzzleloader hunters are asked why they do not hunt with a bow or muzzleloader. Most non-bowhunters do not hunt with a bow because they are either not interested or they do not have the time to learn to hunt with a bow. Likewise, most non-muzzleloader hunters do not hunt with a muzzleloader either because they are not interested, they don't know how, or they don't have time to learn.

In spite of the low saliency of the possible impediment of a mandatory course, when asked directly, 13% of active hunters said a mandatory hunter education course specifically for bowhunting would prevent them from bowhunting. Fifteen percent of active hunters said a mandatory hunter education course specifically for muzzleloading would prevent them from hunting with a muzzleloader.

However, 82% of active hunters said a mandatory hunter education course specifically for bowhunting would not prevent them from hunting with a bow while 79% of active hunters said that a mandatory hunter education course specifically for muzzleloading would not prevent them from hunting with a muzzleloader.

Whereas mandatory courses for bowhunting or muzzleloading do not appear to hinder recruitment into these activities to any substantial degree, neither does a voluntary course appear to motivate non-bowhunters to bowhunt nor non-muzzleloader hunters to muzzleload hunt. Only 12% of active hunters said a voluntary hunter education course specifically for bowhunting would motivate them to hunt with a bow, and 11% of active hunters said a voluntary hunter education course specifically for muzzleloading would motivate them to hunt with a muzzleloader.

Similar to the poor penetration of advertising among youth who were interested in hunting, fewer than half (45%) of active hunters had ever seen a basic or advanced hunter education course advertised. However, unlike the youth who did not know who to call to find out more information about hunter education, most active hunters knew to contact their state fish and wildlife agency (65%), a local gun club (13%), or a sporting goods store (8%).

**This cover story, by Mark Damian Duda and Kira C. Young, is based on a report listed in our Spring 1997 Newsletter: *The Effects of Mandatory Basic Hunters Education and Advanced Hunter Training on Hunter Recruitment, Satisfaction, and Retention* (MIN 809780055, 34 pp.)**

## NEW REPORTS

### MAMMALS

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4. Mammals Research. Pronghorn Research: Pronghorn Winter Wheat Damage Study. Strohmeier, D.C.; White, G.C.; Gill, R.B. CO Div. of Wildl. Final Report. 1996. 28 pp. /1 mf/. MIN 059780079

5. Indiana Bat Summer Habitat Patterns in Missouri. Clawson, R.L. MO Dept. of Conserv. Final Report. 1996. 16 pp. /1 mf/. MIN 249780080

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8. Relationships Among Prey Abundance, Habitat, and American Marten in Northern Maine. Lachowski, H.J. M.S. Thesis. Univ. of Maine. 1997. 88 pp. /1 mf/. MIN 189730044

9. Seed Predation by Small Mammals on Three Species of Trees in an Oak-Pine Forest Ecosystem. McCracken, K.E. Ph.D. Dissert. Univ. of Maine. 1996. 114 pp. /2 mf/. MIN 189730045

10. Ecological Relationships Among Bobcats, Coyotes, and Gray Foxes in Central Mississippi. Edwards, D.A. M.S. Thesis. MS State Univ. 1996. 206 pp. /3 mf/. MIN 239730046

11. Bobcat, Coyote, and Gray Fox Micro-Habitat Use and Interspecies Relationships in a Managed Forest in Central Mississippi. Lovell, C.D. M.S. Thesis. MS State Univ. 1996. 184 pp. /2 mf/. MIN 239730047

12. History, Status and Habitat Components of Black Bears in Mississippi. Shropshire, C.C. M.S. Thesis. MS State Univ. 1996. 316 pp. /4 mf/. MIN 239730048

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Testimony Notes

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With the greatest respect for the sponsor and supporters I rise in opposition to this bill.

1. Regardless of the rhetorical fog raised in support of HB 382 - this bill effectively guts the mandatory Hunter Ed requirement that has made hunting safer since 1957. Five Years? After five years why bother?. In Montana the age 12 standard for a first hunting license with adult supervision to age 14 has been successful and universally approved among the people of this state for more than 50 years.

2. The anti-mandatory hunter ed program claims to be supportive of Hunter Education but this is true in the mouth and not in the hand. In Maryland last year a proposal for a new minimum age law drew the following rhetoric from USSA - "If passed, this bill will have a devastating effect on recruiting young hunters and the future of wildlife conservation in Maryland," said Rob Sexton, USSA vice president for government affairs. "The bill is a deliberate attempt to sabotage the future of hunting." - The bills are not exactly parallel - the attitude is the point.

3. The supporters of this bill employ statistical evidence that is questionable at best in its validity. One dimensional social measurements can easily be made to show a stark decline in new hunter numbers under mandatory hunter ed regimes.


When more precise measurement discipline is employed, however, this effect disappears. Below the age of 15 mandatory hunter education has no statistical effect on the probability that a youth will become a hunter.

- In a peer-reviewed study in 1997, Heberlein and Thomson demonstrated that creation of mandatory Hunter Ed programs were largely a response to new social issues such as urbanization that both impacted hunter competency and hunting desireability. Once these social issues were taken into account the hunter ed barrier to new hunter recruitment disappears.

4. In fact, there is vast anecdotal evidence to show that many, many mothers, in particular non-hunting mothers, will allow their son or daughter to go hunting ONLY because they have completed the Hunter Ed course.

5. Statistics and Anecdotal evidence do show positively that mandatory hunter ed becomes a barrier to youths who miss the age 12-14 year opportunity window. It is for this reason we should have a one-year 16 and older program as four other states created last year alone.

6. The hunting community should spend its time addressing the social factors that really do prevent youths from becoming hunters. There are many, school activities is the worst in Montana.....



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